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**The ethics of narrative art:  
Philosophy in schools, compassion and learning from stories**

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**Abstract**

Following neo-Aristotelians Alasdair MacIntyre and Martha Nussbaum, we claim that humans are story-telling animals who learn from the stories of diverse others. Moral agents use rational emotions, such as compassion, which is our focus here, to imaginatively reconstruct others' thoughts, feelings and goals. In turn, this imaginative reconstruction plays a crucial role in deliberating and discerning how to act. A body of literature has developed in support of the role narrative artworks (i.e. novels and films) can play in allowing us the opportunity to engage imaginatively and sympathetically with diverse characters and scenarios in a safe protected space that is created by the fictional world. By practising what Nussbaum calls a 'loving attitude', her version of ethical attention, we can form virtuous habits that lead to *phronesis* (practical wisdom). In this paper, and taking compassion as an illustrative focus, we examine the ways that students' moral education might usefully develop from engaging with narrative artworks through Philosophy for Children (P4C), where philosophy is a praxis, conducted in a classroom setting using a Community of Inquiry (CoI). We argue that narrative artworks provide useful stimulus material to engage students, generate student questions, and motivate philosophical dialogue and the formation of good habits, which, in turn, supports the argument for philosophy to be taught in schools.

**Key words**

compassion; CoI; moral education; narrative; P4C; philosophy

## Introduction

There are good prima facie reasons for accepting that children engage in narrative artworks in various aspects of their education and schooling. Whether through subject-based curricula (such as literature, history, geography, social studies, art and drama), through pastoral support programmes, or through other educational activities (such as excursions to museums), narrative artworks are a common feature of children's lived experience. Our interest here is the extent to which, and ways in which, children's educational engagements with narrative artworks hold the potential to connect to philosophical notions of the good life and human flourishing.

The question of how one might live a good life has been—and continues to be—a central, shared concern of philosophers and educators. We start by making two suggestions: (1) that humans are story-telling animals; and, (2) that narrative artworks provide a valuable resource for engaging with the stories of diverse others, including regarding the nature of the good life and human flourishing. On the basis of these two suggestions we seek to make two, related and further claims of import for education: (1) that educators have a responsibility to engage children in *specifically philosophical* questions about the stories they hear, read, share and explore—that is, questions which engage children with ideas of human nature and what it means to live a good life; and, (2) that engaging in such specifically philosophical questions places certain important curricular and pedagogical demands upon schools and teachers. In order to illustrate the sorts of arguments we wish to make in the paper, we focus specifically on the virtue of compassion as a morally educative virtue.

To advance these arguments, and following this introduction, the paper comprises three main sections. In the first, we make some rudimentary comments about humans as story-telling animals. In the second, we offer a deeper analysis of the educational value of narrative artworks. In this second section, we draw on the virtue of compassion to illustrate the arguments we seek to make. In the third section, we explore some core educational implications of our analysis, including the need to give explicit attention to philosophy and philosophical questions in order to maximise the educational value of narrative artworks.

The significance of the analysis we offer lies in the extent to which narrative artworks can, and should, be considered as moral resources for educators; moral resources, that is, which require explicit engagement with philosophical ideas, concepts and questions if they are to provide a formative function. In this way we

are making a stronger claim than simply defending stories as sources of entertainment, which is, of course, another valid function of stories. On our reading, we concur with Nussbaum's suggestions that 'certain novels are, irreplaceably, works of moral philosophy' and that 'the novel can be a paradigm of moral activity' (Nussbaum 1987, p. 170). In concurring, however, we are both mindful of, and interested in, the pedagogical implications of such a claim.

We should also note that for the purposes of this paper, and for reasons of space, we do not provide a precise overall account of the moral basis of stories. While there are interesting and important philosophical and educational debates concerning the relationship between the aesthetic and moral worth of works of art (see, for example, Carroll 2000; Mejia & Montoya 2017; D'Olimpio 2017) it will suffice for our purposes here to assume the position defended by Carroll (2000) of moderate moralism (or Gaut's ethicism, again see Carroll 2000) that works of art—such as novels and stories—contain at least some moral content, and such moral content may be evaluated in light of the overall or aesthetic evaluation of artworks. This seems particularly reasonable when it comes to narrative artworks, as Nussbaum notes, which necessarily raise ethical questions pertaining to *life* (Nussbaum 1998). Thus, we maintain that narrative artworks contain moral content which may be critiqued and responded to by readers of such texts.

### **Humans as story-telling animals**

Humans are story-telling animals. We tell the narratives of our lives and the world in which we live, and the versions of the stories we tell affect ourselves as well as others with whom we share these tales. The ancient Greek philosophers were aware of this, with Plato worrying about the effects of stories on children and citizens. In Book III of the *Republic*, he refers to censorship and the supervision of story-tellers (including the artists and the poets). Aristotle was similarly aware of the power of stories, yet held a more favourable view of their role in society, as evidenced in the *Poetics* in which he speaks of stories as a form of imitation of life, which is natural to children. We learn through imitation, he claims, and then represent the truth we discover in various ways to others. It is through dialogue that we shape a shared understanding of the world we inhabit.

Medieval thinkers St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas similarly expressed an understanding of the way in which stories can help us to find meaning in life. The example of the role of parables and stories of scripture illustrate how narratives can connect diverse people, uniting them in a shared vision of values and belief.

Influenced by these Christian philosophers, and following Aristotle, contemporary virtue ethicist Alasdair MacIntyre defends an account of humans as story-telling animals in *After Virtue* (1981/1984). MacIntyre argues:

A central thesis then begins to emerge: man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth. But the key question for men is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'. (1984, p. 216)

Indeed, the philosophical tradition of Philosophy for Children (P4C) that was started by Matthew Lipman and the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC) at Montclair State University in New Jersey, USA, sought to return to the idea that (particular) stories were the perfect vehicle for doing philosophy with children for two reasons; they were engaging and age-appropriate. At the time Lipman was writing, the university departments teaching philosophy tended towards content-driven lectures without any emphasis on the pragmatic *doing* of philosophy. The *doing* of philosophy, he argued, was important to teach children philosophical thinking skills, rather than solely learning philosophical content or the history of ideas by rote. The idea that literature could be a vehicle for philosophical knowledge was not new, even if nearly forgotten by the Western analytic tradition of the academy at the time in which Lipman was writing. It is noted:

For the greater part of their history in Western civilisation, literature and philosophy have been estranged from one another. But this was hardly the case during those early centuries in Greece which saw the emergence of philosophical thinking. Prior to Aristotle, in fact, philosophy was virtually always embodied in some literary vehicle. There were the aphorisms of Heraclitus and the poetry of Parmenides, just as there were later to be the dramatic dialogues of Plato. (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyan 1977, p. 23)

Like Lipman, we argue that narratives can be philosophical; they can tell truths and be morally educative. Storytelling, in which authors make use of language and the mode of writing to communicate their ideas, is a powerful medium by which one may express morality and influence others. According to Iris Murdoch, judgements about value(s) are unavoidable in narrative works as, 'one cannot avoid value judgements. Values show, and show clearly, in literature' (Murdoch, quoted in Magee 1978, p. 278). Value judgements are embedded in our language and the

words we use often imply or presume certain kinds of moral evaluations. Murdoch notes that:

It is important to remember that language itself is a moral medium, almost all uses of language convey value. This is one reason why we are almost always morally active. Life is soaked in the moral, literature is soaked in the moral ... So the novelist is revealing his values by any sort of writing which he may do. He is particularly bound to make moral judgements in so far as his subject-matter is the behaviour of human beings. (Murdoch 1998, pp. 27-28)

In the sections which follow we examine in further detail the ways in which particular narratives might be philosophical, conveying truth and values, in a way that may be deemed to be morally educative when engaged with in a certain way.

### **The educative value of narrative artworks**

Drawing upon Aristotle, as well as Iris Murdoch, Martha Nussbaum argues that we can, through imaginative and compassionate engagement with the stories of diverse others, learn to adopt a moral attitude. We can practise this caring disposition when hearing about the experiences of others, even—and perhaps even more so—if these others are fictional characters.

One way we can learn, morally, from narrative artworks, is by practising a ‘loving attitude’ or caring disposition that eventually becomes a rational habit engrained in our character. By practising this moral attitude in relation to characters in stories, we are protected in a safe fictional space and therefore may find it easier to take the perspective of others. Nussbaum writes:

The aesthetic activity, which takes place in a safe and protected ‘potential space’ where our own safety is not immediately threatened, harnesses the pleasure of exploring to the neediness and insufficiency that is its object, thus making our limitations pleasing, and at least somewhat less threatening, to ourselves. (Nussbaum 2001, p. 244)

In her work, Nussbaum (2001, p. 301) focuses on the notion of compassion, which she terms an ‘intelligent emotion’, as providing an important disposition to be developed through engagement with narrative artworks. Crucial in this regard are the ways in which narrative artworks allow us both to engage with the thoughts, feelings and goals of key protagonists and to use our imaginative capacities to develop the sympathy and empathy for others—including others who are different from ourselves—which compassion requires. Literary artworks are not only life-like

enough, but also best capture the subtleties of real moral dilemmas and thus provide us with a useful proxy in order to practise moral discernment.

To understand this last point, we must appreciate certain features of compassion. The first concerns the extent to which compassion requires some form of harmony between sympathy (the care-based sorrow we feel at the suffering of others) and empathy (the 'imaginative reconstruction', to use Blum's (1987, p. 232) term, of the others' suffering, which blends self- and other-focused role-taking (for a fuller discussion of these elements of compassion, see Peterson 2017). Once these two characteristics of compassion are identified, the realisation that one's imaginative reconstruction of an other (in compassion's case an other who is suffering) may be fallible becomes crucial, and moves the compassionate subject to engage further in order to understand the other. Such understanding forms a crucial part in the discernment and deliberation central to *phronesis* (or practical wisdom).

To possess moral virtues means, on Aristotle's (2009, p. 30) account, 'to feel them at the right time, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way'. Given this, understanding the other—and in turn understanding ourselves—in ways which seek to reduce the empathic gap seem crucial, and to this end particular forms of narrative artwork are particularly apt. As Nussbaum (2001, p. 328) suggests, 'only in fiction is the mind of the other transparent. The empathetic person attempts to reconstruct the mental experience of another'. Through engaging with those of others, the compassionate agent adopts a more reflexive understanding of their own thoughts and feelings. Certainly, narratives must be somewhat like our own world and experiences in order for us to identify with, understand and interpret them correctly; if novels weren't at all based in reality they wouldn't make any sense. This is evident as novels often make use of linear time and the characters are humans with thoughts and emotions and act upon a world in a similar way to us. Even science fiction stories have enough similarities to make them relevant and meaningful to their readers. Nussbaum argues that, if we meaningfully engage with and practise an ethical mode of attention to scenarios and characters depicted, this can enable us to engage with and learn, two particular philosophical/moral concerns: (1) moral truth and (2) human flourishing.

Moral truth on this account is wider than that of a solely propositional account. Here Nussbaum draws upon the pragmatist and author Henry James, claiming that moral knowledge restricted to propositions would be incomplete and what is needed is a broader understanding of moral knowledge. Nussbaum argues, 'Moral knowledge, James suggests, is not simply intellectual grasp of propositions; it is not even simply



intellectual grasp of particular facts; it is perception. It is seeing a complex, concrete reality in a highly lucid and richly responsive way; it is taking in what is there, with imagination and feeling.' (Nussbaum 1992, p. 152).

In illustrating her point, Nussbaum goes into great detail in her analysis of classical works of literature such as Henry James' *The Golden Bowl* (1905). James' work is considered as an example of (perhaps rare) narrative art that is both aesthetically and ethically good. The intricate detail with which James describes the characters, their inner worlds, as well as their moral dilemmas is what particularly resonates with the attentive reader, allowing a caring attitude to be adopted to fallible, human characters that we recognise are 'like us' in important respects. As we engage imaginatively with the plight of these fictional others, we care about the decisions they make and the consequences of their actions in the fictional storyworld. In this way, the empathetic reader is practising a moral attitude of compassion and sympathetic engagement with other(s) who differ to themselves. A central idea defended here is that the nuances of moral judgement sometimes escape the black and white depiction of analytic moral philosophy and are better expressed in narrative form. In this way, Nussbaum believes that moral philosophers would do well to consider *A Golden Bowl* a work of moral philosophy! It is the detail and nuance of good narrative artworks that allows for sympathetic engagement with the characters' thoughts, intentions, feelings, behaviour and circumstances.

A key aspect of this sympathetic engagement is the potential of good narrative artworks to engage us in dialogue and reflection about human flourishing and what it means to live a good life (for a more detailed and nuanced philosophical discussion of how readers engage with narrative works, see Mejia & Montoya 2017; Currie 1997; Kreitman 2006). In her work on compassion, Nussbaum (2001) identifies *eudaimonistic judgement* as central to compassion. When we exercise this judgement we become closer to the other who is suffering; that is, we come to see them and their humanity as inherently important to our own lives. As Nussbaum (1997, p. 319) explains 'she must take that person's ill as affecting her own flourishing. In effect, she must make herself vulnerable in the person of another'. In this way, when compassion is in action we not only recognise the cause of the other, we bring that cause into our own goals. A crucial part of this process is understanding what human flourishing and conceptions of the good life are so far as those suffering are concerned. As these may be rather different to our own, a fundamental requirement of the compassionate agent is to extend their compassion to those different to themselves and, indeed, to engage with such difference.

In focusing on the value of narrative artworks in relation to moral truth and human flourishing, Nussbaum offers a positive causal link between morality and literature as she believes that *good* literature can assist us in understanding morality, as well as enable the practise of virtuous conduct and ethical decision-making in our everyday lives. By practising a loving attitude towards characters in works of fiction, we care about their plight. If we practise this moral attitude firstly in the safe fictional space, we can then apply it to real life others we encounter.

This causal argument will only work if we agree with Nussbaum's starting point, that humans are rational and emotional, embodied and contextual. The good life, on such an account, requires others *as well as myself* to flourish, and communities to support and promote healthy policies and institutions conducive to this flourishing (*eudaimonia*). This contextual, empirical approach to moral value entails that the search for exceptionless moral rules is misguided, even if general capabilities, for instance, are useful and worth legislating at a societal or global level. At the level of personal decision-making, the virtue ethicist allows for contextual consideration of moral acts and will further point out that *how* I act upon the virtue of, for instance, compassion, depends on the situation at hand and the people involved in the moral context under consideration. All of these factors, discerned through practical wisdom, will impact upon the moral appropriateness of the agent's response. Thus we can see how Nussbaum's 'loving attitude', her version of ethical attention, encourages a certain perspective to be adopted with reference to ethical situations and decision-making. This loving attitude calls on the love or compassion (a feeling component with a cognitive element as well as a volitional aspect) working alongside the intellect and the imagination. These three elements work together in order to understand the facts of a particular situation, whereby the ethical agent may empathise by imaginatively engaging with the plight of the people in the scenario and then 'seeing' how to appropriately respond. The imagination, emotions and narratives, then, are important to a holistic approach to being human. Nussbaum explains:

I defend the literary imagination precisely because it seems to me an essential ingredient of an ethical stance that asks us to concern ourselves with the good of other people whose lives are distant from our own ... an ethics of impartial respect for human dignity will fail to engage real human beings unless they are capable of entering imaginatively into the lives of distant others and to have emotions related to that participation. (Nussbaum 1995, xvi)

### Engaging students in narrative artworks – the need for philosophy

In this section, we build on the arguments advanced so far to explore some pedagogical possibilities central to engaging students in narrative artworks. Before exploring the pedagogical possibilities, we wish briefly to spend some time first setting out some justifications for the place of philosophy within the curriculum of schools, in particular those curricula experienced by children before the age of 16. Such justifications are multiple, interconnected and recognise both empirical and normative concerns. The first is the idea alluded to previously that young people *already* engage in various ways with the sorts of questions central to philosophy and philosophical investigation. Whether through familial, community, religious, media or peer-based interactions, questions concerning who we are, how we live our lives, how and why we relate to others, and what our rights and responsibilities are (to give just a few examples), are ones which are prominent in the daily lives of young people. In other words, young people are already likely to be philosophically active, but not necessarily with the support and structure to make sense of such activity in a structured and philosophically rigorous manner.

A second reason for including philosophy in the school curriculum relates to the sorts of questions young people are likely to be considering as part of their daily lives, which are also questions which feature within the aims and/or curricula of Westernised educational jurisdictions, but which may remain under-explored without specific attention and careful cultivation. Our focus on compassion illustrates this point rather well. The goal of educating young people to be compassionate (sometimes also expressed through associated terms such as empathy and care) is not uncommon within official curricula, educational practice and educational literature<sup>1</sup>. It is a goal which transcends narrow educational outcomes relating to economic utility and academic achievement, and which speaks of our relationship to others as human beings. As Peterson (2017) has argued elsewhere, cultivating compassion is not a process which is either simple or straightforward, but rather one which requires careful, targeted and consistent nurturing. Such nurturing involves some level of engagement with concepts, ideas, and processes which are precisely philosophical. Let us take an example to illustrate. If a goal of education and schooling is to educate compassionate young people—a goal which

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<sup>1</sup> There are too many examples to cite here, but –and for example–the current version of the National Australian Curriculum includes a focus on care and compassion, as well as empathy, for instance as identified under the general capability entitled ‘ethical understanding’. Empathy also features strongly within the International Baccalaureate curriculum. Initiatives such as the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning programme in England provide practical instances of such a focus.

we have argued here involves engaging with narratives—then engaging with notions of human flourishing and what it means to lead a good life are crucial. As we have suggested above, educating about and for compassion involves us in coming to understand—through deliberation with others and within ourselves—*eudaimonistic* judgements. Such deliberation ‘requires a capacity for critical reflection, consideration of alternative possibilities, and a genuine concern for truth and clarity’ (Cam 2014, p. 1204); in other words, the development of a particular form of practical wisdom through which young people seek to discern appropriate moral responses within given contexts.

Third, there is a growing body of empirical research which suggests important outcomes for pupils’ cognitive and socio-emotional development through engagement with philosophical ideas and processes (Millett & Tapper 2012; Topping & Trickey 2007a, 2007b; Trickey & Topping 2006; Fair et al. 2015a, 2015b; EEF 2015; Gorard, Siddiqui & See 2017). Such research is being further invested in, as exemplified by the Education Endowment Foundation of the UK having awarded SAPERE (Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education) a £1,204,000 grant in 2016 to further test the empirical results of children studying philosophy on children’s social skills and cognitive abilities. The results of this second study will be published in 2021<sup>2</sup>.

In offering these justifications for philosophy in the school curriculum we are not suggesting that philosophy *necessarily* needs to exist as a separate and distinct curriculum subject. Our weaker claim is that, taught well, philosophy may be engaged with within existing subjects, but this requires explicit cultivation, and preferably by teachers who have themselves been educated in the field of philosophy. Our stronger claim is that teaching philosophy and ethics as a distinct curriculum subject using a pedagogy that prioritises the students’ own questions and includes narratives would allow students to explicitly reflect upon the ethical values, norms and concerns central to *their* good life in a way that is not usually invited or encouraged in other subjects. In both claims, we are suggesting that without explicit focus and cultivation the contribution of philosophy is left to chance, and as a result may be underplayed or neglected altogether.

### *Philosophical pedagogy using narratives*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/our-work/projects/sapere-philosophy-for-children-effectiveness-trial/> for more details

In the preceding sections, we have argued that humans are story-telling beings and that narrative artworks are of ethical and educative value for the extent to which they provide possibilities for engaging with core moral ideas. So far as the education of children in schools is concerned, however, it seems appropriate to suggest that while narrative artworks provide the *potential* for moral and philosophical learning, such educative outcomes require explicit cultivation in order to be realised in practice. One can readily imagine, for example, a child in school reading Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) who does not necessarily engage with the text's central and deep moral content without the requisite support and pedagogical intervention of the teacher. In this section, we suggest some key pedagogical considerations for engaging children with narrative artworks, suggesting as we do so that each of these considerations requires teachers to engage *explicitly* in essentially philosophical questions, in both the construction of materials (the selection and adaptation of resources and associated activities, for example) and their use with children. Indeed, Nussbaum herself is aware of the objection that critics such as Richard Posner aim at her claim that narrative artworks can be morally educative. Posner cites instances of literature-loving Nazis and English professors who are no more moral than anyone else (Posner 1997, pp. 4-5) while also reminding us of the importance of a good upbringing when it comes to moral formation. However, Nussbaum needn't deny these examples in order to still defend her position. In fact, she happily grants Posner's point that empathy in and of itself will not sufficiently motivate good action, and such an emotion must be grounded in a good early education in childhood for it to motivate any moral concern for others (Nussbaum 1998, p. 352). Nussbaum simply claims that some literature *can* have a morally beneficial effect, not that it always will. However, for those instances where a good narrative artwork does have such an effect, the reading of that work itself can be deemed a moral act.

A claim defended here with respect to the morally educative power of certain narratives is that fictional stories can articulate moral truth. Again, we ought to respond to the skeptic who enquires that, while adopting a caring disposition towards fictional stories may seem like a nice thing to do, how does that result in moral truth? Furthermore, how does it entail learning about moral truths rather than simply confirming moral truths the reader already knows? This criticism suggests that a reader must already be aware of the atrocities of, for instance, slavery, in order to appropriately empathise with Huck and Jim in *Huckleberry Finn* (Twain 1884). Propositional moral truths, or *knowing that* may not be the kind of truths we are learning through our engagement with literature. About this, Posner or the skeptic may be correct. However, drawing upon Gilbert Ryle's distinction between *knowing*

that and *knowing how*, we may be learning about the contextual application of morality or 'what it is like' via imaginatively adopting other perspectives and thinking through various scenarios in our minds. This *knowing how* or '*knowing what it is like*' is a pragmatic aspect of moral knowledge (Hepburn 1990). It is worth noting, though, for the aesthetically and ethically good artwork to have such an effect, the reader themselves must be appropriately sensitive and adopt a loving attitude in order to engage compassionately with the characters and scenario depicted. This is precisely why our focus on how to engage with appropriate narrative texts in the classroom via encouraging students to practice a loving attitude or the virtue of compassion is so important. And on this point of how this may be done, pedagogically, Nussbaum is silent.

If we accept, as we would wish to do, that narrative artworks offer crucial educational possibilities, a further question becomes precisely *which* artworks. At a general level, there is some agreement that not all works of art offer the same educational potential in this regard. That is, while some (good) narrative artworks may have a morally educative role to play, the role of other (less good) narrative artworks is less certain. As Nussbaum notes:

One can think of works of art which can be contemplated reasonably well without asking any urgent questions about how one should live. Abstract formalist paintings are sometimes of this character, and some intricate but non-programmatic works of music (though by no means all). But it seems highly unlikely that a responsive reading of any complex literary work is utterly detached from concerns about time and death, about pain and the transcendence of pain, and so on -- all the material of 'how one should live' questions as I have conceived it. (Nussbaum 1998, p. 358)

According to Nussbaum (2001, p. 433) 'the fact that Sophoclean tragedy inspires compassion for human suffering and the fact that it is great and powerful poetry are not independent facts: it is the poetic excellence that conveys compassion to the spectator, cutting through the habits of the everyday'; while Bohlin (2005, p. 15) identifies the challenges educators face from 'the range of negative narrative images and stimuli that feed the imaginations and aspirations of young people', including 'widely popularized books that idealize the fast track to fame and fortune'.

Crucial here is the role of narratives in permitting pupils to engage with the thoughts, feelings and goals of others, including tracing how these develop and respond to formative experiences. In her work on teaching character through literature, Bohlin (2005, p. 49) refers to such experiences as 'morally pivotal points' —

events through which characters 'reassess or refine their life goal(s) or path(s)'. When a philosophical approach is taken, literature and testimony enables pupils to consider and explore the characters and their actions involved in relation to their own responses in ways which allow and shape reflection on the good life and human flourishing. In this way, narrative artworks engaged with philosophically can allow young people to contemplate how their character and actions—including virtuous actions—represent expressions of themselves. As Bohlin (2005, p. 18) contends, it can provide a tool for reflection on character which 'happens somewhere between the heart and the will, every time characters make a choice, particularly choices that somehow define who they are and mark an important change of focus'. To frame such explorations, Bohlin helpfully sets out four common features—each of them apt for exploring compassion—upon which teachers can focus in teaching character through literature: (i) 'relationships'; (ii) 'learning from pain and acquiring new pleasures'; (iii) 'thoughtful reflection'; and, (iv) 'courage to face the truth (about reality, oneself, and others)' (2005, p. 25). To reinforce the point being made here: narrative artworks clearly have the potential to move children to feel and express sympathy, empathy and compassion whether or not these are intended by teachers. However, without an explicit and philosophically aware discussion of those feelings—including their cognitive dimensions—the ethical and educative potential of such artworks are neglected, and are so in ways which restrict children's moral development.

### *The philosophical community of inquiry*

The philosophical community of inquiry (CoI) provides a particularly apt pedagogical tool to foster the explicit and philosophical discussion required to draw out the moral learning of narrative artworks. In a CoI, participants are seated in an inward-facing circle and the teacher facilitates a discussion based on the students' own questions. In order to generate the students' questions, teachers may firstly use an age-appropriate text. Traditionally, Lipman used novels he wrote, such as *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* (1974), which were imbued with philosophical ideas and involved characters discussing ideas and reflecting on experiences that would be similar to those encountered by school-aged children. The relevant chapter would be read aloud, paragraph by paragraph, by those seated in the CoI and then, after a brainstorming session or activity, a central question would be democratically decided upon by the group as the focus for the ensuing CoI. This central question should be philosophical: open, 'deep', and not a question that yields an immediately

obvious answer. As facilitator of the discussion rather than the authoritarian source of all knowledge, a teacher's role in the CoI is radically altered. In a CoI the focus is not on learning philosophical content by rote, but, rather, on *doing* philosophy in order to develop critical thinking, caring responses, creativity and the ability to work together collaboratively with respect for diverse ideas in the search for truth and wisdom.

By commencing a CoI with a narrative, the students are encouraged to identify with the main character, such as Harry, and place themselves in the shoes of this character as he seeks to understand concepts and refine arguments. The CoI dialogue that follows is student-led and, ideally, sees participants willing to critically engage with their own and others' ideas, while compassionately responding to the views of others as they are encountered. Far from there being 'no correct answers', the philosophical CoI should see participants move away from the worst answers or arguments and move towards more reasonable, justified ideas while also recognising a common humanity, even with those with whose ideas one disagrees. As Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan remark:

To the extent that philosophy presents a range of alternative views about values, meaning and knowledge itself, it liberates children from the dogmatism of ignorance, outlines relative considerations that have been developed, and encourages that 'thinking for oneself' which is so much the mark of a truly educated person. (1977, p. 11)

Teacher training is central to the aim of a CoI generating a *philosophical* dialogue and thus training the philosophical thinking skills of its participants. Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan distinguish between a conversation, a good conversation, and a philosophical conversation. A conversation may be disjointed and superficial where as a good conversation may have flow and direction and arrive at a conclusion or resolution. A philosophical conversation is a good conversation that pertains to deep ideas, and seeks to clarify concepts that may be debated or arguments that may not be entirely settled (such as 'what makes a good person?' or 'does God exist?'). The teacher must have training in both the P4C and CoI pedagogy as well as in the study of philosophy, otherwise they may not develop a philosophical ear to recognise the philosophical nature or potential in children's contributions or questions. To this effect:

Further, in regard to the training of teachers to encourage philosophical thinking, it is the exposure to and the involvement with the history of philosophical ideas that enables a prospective teacher to develop an



appreciation for philosophical questioning himself. This sensitivity is essential if one is even to hear the philosophical significance of what children say. If one cannot hear the philosophical dimension, then it is inconceivable to expect the teacher to aid children in coming to a deeper awareness of it themselves. (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyan 1977, p. 11)

The role of the teacher, even in a student-led CoI, is thus pivotal in guiding students to critically reflect and compassionately consider the ideas, examples and associated feelings of others as well as their own. Participating in a CoI provides the individual with an opportunity to recognise that they are not an isolated cogito but, rather, 'one among others' (Splitter 2011, p. 497). As it is recognised that others are more or less similar to oneself, even when we have different thoughts, feelings and experiences, we feel compassion towards them as we are united by a sense of common humanity. Splitter identifies three key components of this process that are cognitive as well as affective. These include, firstly, appreciating my own self-worth, arising from a recognition of my role in the community; secondly, appreciating that others are also striving for this kind of self-appreciation; and thirdly, 'understanding that self-appreciation and appreciation for others are interdependent and mutually reinforcing' (Splitter 2011, pp. 497-8). In seeking shared values that arise from a context, in a time and a place, the group must care about one another if it is to function well (D'Olimpio [2016] makes a similar argument about the virtue of trust). This is further reinforced by Splitter's remark that '[t]he coi is an interactive environment whose entire rationale is the wellbeing of its members (in intellectual, moral and affective terms)' (2011, p. 498). Similarly, the virtue ethicist recognises individual *eudaimonia* is intrinsically linked to the wellbeing of the polis (Aristotle 2009) or, in this instance, the community, including the school community and the wider community of which the school is a part. By engaging philosophically with narratives within an educational setting, using a CoI pedagogy, children are given the opportunity to practise, in a safe space, the moral attitude of compassion, while developing their techniques of critical reflection; skills that prepare them for the role of living a good life.

## Conclusion

We have suggested that we are story-telling animals who learn from the stories of diverse others. Moral agents use rational emotions such as compassion to imagine 'what it is like' for another prior to deciding how they should act. Narrative artworks, such as aesthetically and ethically good novels and films, allow us – and

young people – the opportunity to engage imaginatively and compassionately with diverse characters and scenarios in a safe protected space that is created by the fictional world. By practising what Nussbaum calls a ‘loving attitude’, her version of ethical attention, we can form virtuous habits that lead to *phronesis* (practical wisdom) and enable us to lead a flourishing life.

On this basis, we have advanced two main educational arguments which connect specifically to the focus of this special issue. The first is the idea that educators have a responsibility to engage children in *specifically philosophical* questions about the stories they hear, read, share and explore. In this way narrative artworks provide insights and stimulus for engaging with ideas of human nature, human relationships and what it means to live a good life. Whether such philosophical questions – which require some level of philosophical understanding on behalf of educators – are best taught through a specific discrete school subject called philosophy or through other curriculum subjects has not been our main focus, given that what seems most pressing is whether philosophy should be taught in schools at all. It seems likely to us that either (or perhaps both) models of curricular inclusion hold particular possibilities. The second main educational argument we have advanced is that engaging children in such specifically philosophical questions places certain important curricular and pedagogical demands upon schools and teachers, demands which can be met by using philosophy as a praxis in the classroom. We have sought to illustrate this claim by exploring how teachers can draw upon narrative art in classrooms in support of a pedagogy designed to promote caring thinking alongside critical, creative and collaborative thinking skills. This may be done by facilitating a community of inquiry, a way of practising philosophy in the classroom, which often utilises narrative as a provocation in order to generate philosophical questions and dialogue from the students who are participants in the inquiry. Teachers may create a safe space for students to co-construct meaning via active engagement with narratives as a stimulus for students’ own ideas. This leads to students participating in meaningful experiences, from which they can learn, reflect and develop virtuous habits. By taking seriously the idea of children as embodied, we can value experiential and affective knowledge alongside a rational, cognitive epistemology. Aesthetic education can work well within this educative approach known as philosophy for children (or P4C) in its search for rational and pragmatic wisdom. For these reasons, philosophy should be included in the classroom and make use of, alongside other texts and stimulus materials, good narrative artworks in order to encourage children to be compassionate as well as critical citizens.

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